

# Going to the Dogs

*The TWRA's new K-9 Corps is bringing a new tool to the agency's Law Enforcement Division.*

*written and  
photographed  
by Larry Self*

**I**t's finally happened, and most of us never saw it coming. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has gone to the dogs. Say hello to the newest members in the ranks of state wildlife officers—and these new officers have four legs. With the addition of two more K-9 officers, the TWRA now has a total of four canines serving in the field.

Please note that these are no run-of-the-mill animals or pampered show dogs. Each of these dogs is highly trained, highly qualified, and—after 10 weeks of rigorous training at the K-9 Police Dog Academy in Kentucky where the K-9 Wildlife Officer Program first spread its wings, and more than their fair share of obedience classes—they have all earned their badges.

The use of canines in police work is nothing new to the modern era, but the introduction of K-9 officers to wildlife work is in its infancy stage compared to how police forces around the country utilize K-9 officers. They're usefulness was first discovered by our troops during World War I when they observed how Germans used dogs such as German Shepherds in their military.

Ken Cutsinger, a TWRA wildlife officer assigned to Campbell County, is one of the original two officers in the state to begin training with a canine partner. The other is

*(left) K-9 Officer  
Macy rides shotgun  
with Wildlife Officer  
Ken Cutsinger.*







*(above) Searching for hidden evidence is just one of the tasks that K-9 Officer Macey is trained to perform.*

*(right) K-9 Officer Macey digs through leaves to uncover a hidden shotgun.*



Amy Snider in Madison County with her yellow lab, Jake.

After completion of her training, Cutsinger's partner Macey—also a yellow lab—competed in a U.S. Police Crime Association (USPCA) event, scoring 199 out of a possible 200 in the evidence detection area. But the K-9 officers aren't trained just to show their skills in competition, it's in fieldwork—tracking, evidence detection, and wildlife detection—where they excel.

That means if you've committed a game violation, running just got tougher, and if you've hidden a gun or other weapon used in the crime, or stashed a deer carcass somewhere, these dogs will probably find it.

Since becoming part of the TWRA Law Enforcement Division, K-9 officers across the state have been involved in everything from tracking to assisting in bait cases—even providing occasional emotional support.

The new K-9 force's responsibilities don't stop with law enforcement. The badge-wearing dogs are also a great public relations tool for the TWRA. From wildlife law awareness to information education, kids learn quickly through demonstrations what these dogs are capable of doing. And what kid doesn't love a good dog, anyway?

In addition to the many hours Cutsinger has spent in the field training with Macey, he and Macey have also represented the agency at many events at area high schools, Cub Scout meetings and other school programs, showing off their skills. Cutsinger even gives out trading cards with Macey's picture on it so that kids will have a reminder of just what the wildlife officer and his K-9 partner are all about.

Macey, through Cutsinger's training, has recently added a new trick to her talents. He has now trained her to locate corn. That means poachers who deal in baiting wildlife like deer and turkey—or even ducks—with corn will have to deal with this four-legged officer's nose.

Of late, Cutsinger has been particularly involved in the training of the two newest dogs in the canine force. Wildlife Officer C.J. Jaynes and his dog, Gus, are based in Bradley County in Region III, while Wildlife Officer Dennis Ward and his dog, Ty, are headquartered in Region IV's Carter County.

Tim Sain, TWRA Law Enforcement Supervisor for Northeast Tennessee, said Ty will be utilized by Officer Ward throughout East Tennessee searching for guns, ammunition, wildlife, and people involved in wildlife crimes. Ty has also been certified to USPCA standards in Detection and Area Searches.

Cutsinger said the two most recent graduates are just beginning



on the job. But Jaynes and his partner, Gus, had an opportunity to help in another way last spring. On the day of the deadly bear attack in the Cherokee National Forest, Jaynes and Gus responded to the campground area. One family had witnessed much of the ordeal and was clearly in shock.

While Jaynes helped the man and his wife pack up from their campsite, Cutsinger said Jaynes asked the couple's two young daughters to take care of his dog. But Gus actually did the "taking care of" by taking the kids' minds off a terrible situation. Cutsinger said he had not realized before that his K-9 partner could also assist with emotional therapy as well.

Amy Snider's dog in Region I's Madison County has been exposed to more fieldwork than her counterparts so far. Snider and Jake have made baiting cases, caught trespassers, and helped locate evidence in the field.

Cutsinger said he and Snider have also been coordinating the training of the two new dogs in the corps and hope to further assist future handlers in training more dogs as they're added to the force. They'll also help to train other K-9 handlers to aid in future training sessions during the program's growth phase.

One particular satisfaction for Cutsinger has been the support of fellow officers within the agency. He says they are standing solidly behind the program and want to see it succeed. Personally, having a K-9 partner has not only changed Cutsinger's job, but also his outlook. As with any career, you sometimes reach a plateau, and that's where Cutsinger was when Macey came along. The program has re-sparked his interest in wildlife law enforcement and his career.

Fred Funte, the TWRA Law Enforcement Supervisor overseeing the statewide K-9 Corps, said the long-term plan is to have a K-9 wildlife officer in each law enforcement area of the state. With three law enforcement areas in each of the state's four regions, that would be a total of 12 canine officers once the program is fully on-line. Currently, Middle Tennessee's Region II is the only



region in the state without a K-9 officer. All of the TWRA dogs are Labrador retrievers that have been either donated to the program by individuals who could no longer keep them or were found at local animal shelters in need of a home—or better yet, a job.

Although showing some early successes, the K-9 program isn't on solid ground just yet, but Funte says he has been pleased with the job the wildlife officers and their K-9 partners are doing at this point. Although the program is less than two years old, Funte said everything associated with it has been really positive, including the fact that the dogs have been great emissaries for the agency within their communities.

Funte is also quick to note the accomplishments of Amy Snider and her K-9 partner in Region I where Jake has made several baiting cases, found game evidence, located tossed firearms, and helped to prove that folks were trespassing. There have been cases where hunters being questioned about whether they were on a certain property or not were tracked back to the area in question.

One benefit that may have been overlooked is the nature of the beast itself. Funte said when violators are told the investigating officer is calling for the K-9 Corps, many of

*(above) Clearing outdoor obstructions like this fence is no obstacle for a four-legged officer.*

them immediately confess. He said having a K-9 officer readily available has proven to be quite a deterrent. He also noted that a K-9 officer often finds evidence much quicker than a human officer, which saves on both time and manpower.

After an initial investment of time and some monies, Tennessee's K-9 program may turn out to be a cost saver all the way around. One thing is for sure, the full potential of the program has yet to be realized, but it looks promising.

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